

CATHOLIC THEATRE

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by the
NATIONAL CATHOLIC THEATRE CONFERENCE

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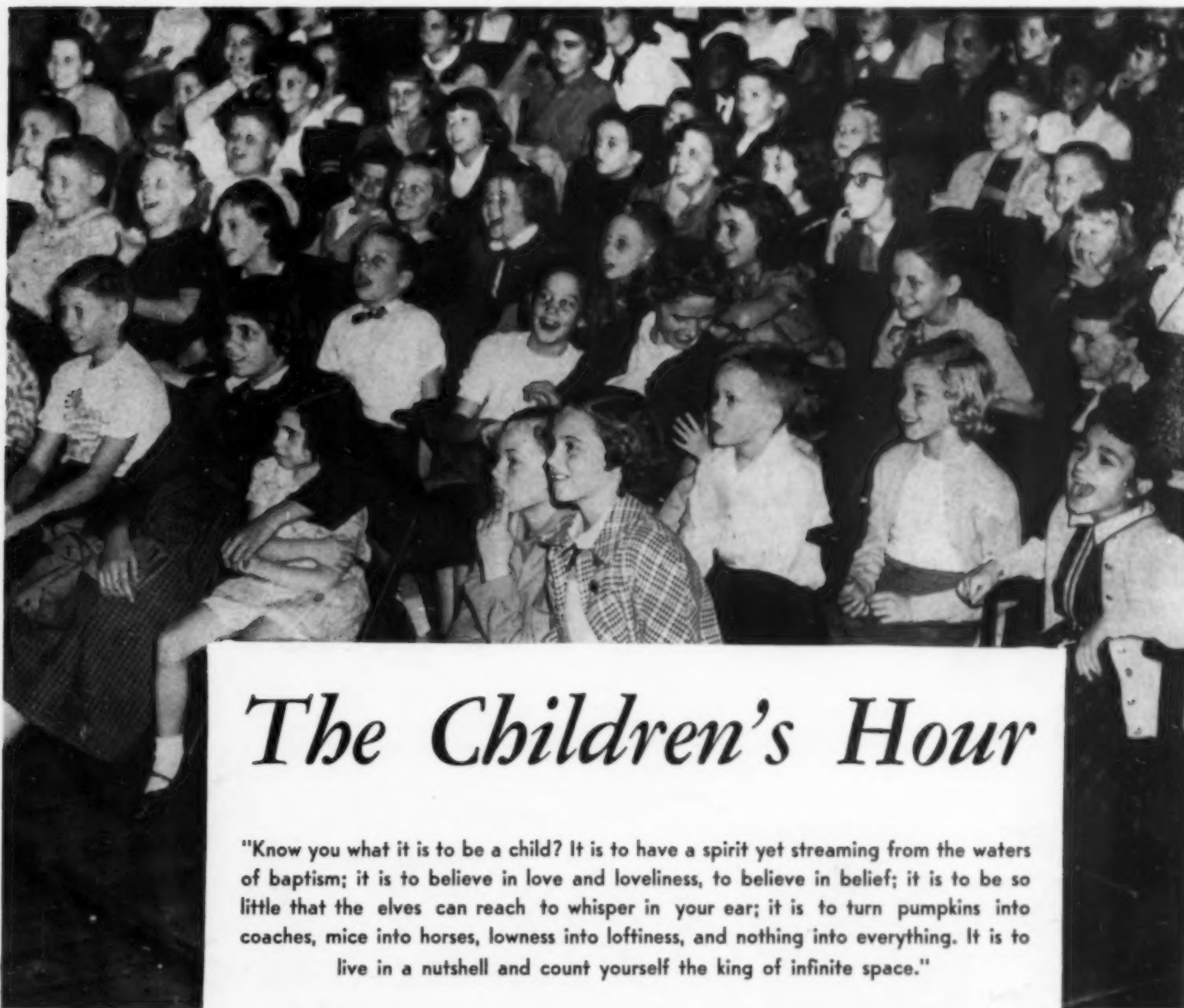
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The Children's Hour

"Know you what it is to be a child? It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love and loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything. It is to live in a nutshell and count yourself the king of infinite space."

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

NEWS NOTES

The Catholic Theatre of Detroit opened its 18th year in January with Charles George's comedy "Look Who's Here!" Father Edward J. Majeske is president and moderator; Father Robert V. Ryan, vice-president, and Miss Nellie Passmore, secretary-treasurer. Their records show 58 adult and 32 children's productions with 71 performances of "Lady of Fatima" and 17 of "Song of Bernadette."

St. Scholastica Academy, Fort Smith, Arkansas, under the direction of Sister M. Leona, O.S.B., presented four one-acters in December: "The Nun with Red Shoes," "Just My Style," "For Love of a House," and "Balsam and Butterflies." The latter led into the Christmas pageant and used the talents of the Negro girls of the dramatics class.

Senior Philelectic Society of Jesuit High School, New Orleans, La., copped first place in the finals of the 11th Annual C.Y.O. One-Act Play Contest for High Schools in December. Winning play was "Here Under the Sun," a premiere

production, written and directed by Mr. Ernest C. Ferlita, S.J. The unpublished drama concerns two Christians, a father and son, who dare resist the dictatorship of a ruthless Communist general.

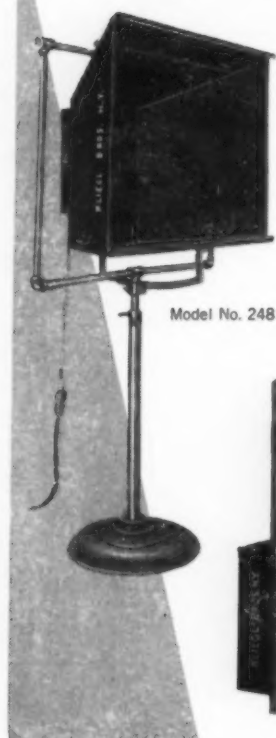
Mother M. Helena's Marquette High School dramatic club, numbering 162, has presented "The Valiant" and "Hour of Honor" this season, with "Wildcat Willie" and "The Bearded Lady" being offered to the student body. Full length February production is "Murder in the Nunnery."

Busy on plays for grade school children are the St. John High School Players, Little Chute, Wis. for production on Sunday afternoons. Scripts are by Jeanne Davis of Catholic U's Winooski, Vt. Playhouse. Sister Mary Honora, O.P., is director.

Cover Photo

Theatre's "best critics" photographed during a performance at Saint Mary College, Xavier, Kansas, where Sister Mary Dolorita, S.C.L. directs. Quote is from Francis Thompson's "Essay on Shelley."

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PAGE TWO



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From the President's Desk . . .

The response to my plea for a Living Endowment for a Catholic Playwrighting Workshop has been overwhelming. In a recent round table discussion with the directors from the North Central Region, I was gratified by their enthusiasm and courage. And who would not be fired with confidence and zeal after reading comments from the mailbag, such as:

"Congratulations . . . The idea is tremendous! . . . Enclosed is our 'mite'—wish it could be \$500." (Sister La Verne, O.S.F.)

"Here is our contribution . . . We wish it could be more because we believe this project is a very worthwhile and needed one." (Sister Irenaeus, C.S.J.)

"I beg you to keep me posted . . . Enclosed you will find an offering of \$5.00 to be set aside for workshop purposes." (Ernest C. Ferlita, S.J.)

"Thank you, Father. Merely to criticize Williams and Miller will not get us far. We really must do something to encourage our Catholic playwrights. I know our Drama Club will want to help financially." (Sister M. Jeanette, O.S.B.)

Response to the idea of a National Playwrighting Festival beginning next fall has also been eager and promising. How wonderful it will be if each individual group member and all the regional and unit Festivals strive to do original,

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unpublished Catholic scripts! With so many prospectors we are bound to find gold.

Inasmuch as the pledge was accidentally omitted by the secretary in the mailing, those of you who wish to join the party will find a Pledge Coupon elsewhere in this issue.

Once again, my earnest, heartfelt gratitude to you for your stirring loyalty and *esprit de corps*. How much good we can do through unity of purpose and effort.

May I also extend congratulations to the many hardworking committees who are beginning to crystallize the findings of months of patient work, correspondence and discussion. We can look forward to some stimulating reports and handbooks. Nor can I omit mention of the truly constructive work achieved by the Constitutional Revision Committee at its January 11 meeting in Chicago. God bless all!

Faithfully in St. Genesius,

Father Gabriel, S.O.B.

PLEDGE COUPON

In the interests of promoting creative writing by Catholic playwrights through the medium of playwrighting workshops and laboratory productions, we

of

pledge:

I. To contribute \$..... toward the Living Endowment for Catholic Playwrighting Workshops (Payment enclosed; bill us later); and

II. To produce during the year of the National Playwriting Festival (September, '58 to August 28, '59) an original, unpublished Catholic play provided that it is feasible from the viewpoint of script quality and suitability to our production limitations.

We understand that we will receive in late summer of 1958 a list of available unpublished Catholic plays which are recommended by the Conference for laboratory or public presentation.

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The "Twirps" Caught Up with Me

by Sister Mary Dolorita, S.C.L.
St. Mary College, Xavier, Kansas

Because of the complaint of many of our grade school teachers, "There are so few good plays for little children," and the request, "Next time, do a play for children," Creative Dramatics and Children's Theatre became an integral part of the drama curriculum at Saint Mary College, Xavier, Kansas. This was 1946.

The one who organized theatre for children at Saint Mary College, was Sister Mary Camilla, who for twenty years headed the drama department, and who for the last ten of those years focused on drama for and with children. So ardent



Tea for four in Saint Mary College, Children's Theatre production of *Alice-In-Wonderland*. The Mad-Hatter at this tea party was Virginia Barton, 1956 graduate of Saint Mary, who helped to originate the first Children's Theatre on any U. S. army post—Fort Leavenworth's Peppermill Playhouse. Virginia has now carried her enthusiasm abroad, working in Germany with Children's Theatre for Special Service branch of the U. S. Army.

a fan was Sister, that she even found time, between times, to write a number of plays for her children's theatre.

It was in 1955 that I arrived to take over a highly organized department. But alas! And alack! All this talent and enthusiasm for CT was not shared by her successor. On first scanning the catalog, I saw crouched between courses in Voice and Diction, Public Speaking, Interpretative Reading, Acting, Directing, History of Theatre, Shakespeare, etc., those black-eyed monsters, Creative Dramatics and Children's Theatre. Two of my two pet peeves. The "twirps" had caught up with me—in fact, had landed in front of me. And like a "twirp," I up and ran.

But fortunately, I ran to just the right place—the CTC at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. The opening demonstration of the theatre conference was step number one in my conversion. For the first time, I saw the work of Virginia

Tanner, whose creative genius with dance-drama for children, is unrivalled anywhere—at home or abroad. Miss Tanner used no theory, no sermonizing or persuasive words. Here was merely a simple demonstration, exquisite and inspirational, of what she is doing with and for "twirps" and for educational theatre.

Step number two was meeting those other ardent pioneers and promoters of CTC—Winifred Ward, Sarah Spencer, Sally Six, Rita Criste and Burdette Fitzgerald—who unfolded the limitless possibilities and far-reaching influences of Children's Theatre.

But watching and listening to experts and putting one's own hands in the pudding are very different experiences. So even after the Salt Lake conference, I was still a bit skeptical about the future of CT at Saint Mary College.

Complete conversion came when I joined the children in the matinee audience for *Beauty and the Beast*—my first Children's Theatre attempt. The apes putting their princess gowns over ape costumes, turned into normal, happy children once again. Incidentally, the stage had not been adequately darkened for the occasion, which would have made the changing inconspicuous. One little snicker was heard, second row from the front. In a flash, the entire audience of "twirps" squelched it with one loud, long, concerted "SHHHHHHHH." This was their way of telling me they believed. *Beauty and the Beast* were *real* people to them. And suddenly, I realized, that *I* actually believed—not only in *Beauty and the Beast*—but in Children's Theatre for "twirps."

(Continued on page twelve.)

CATHOLIC THEATRE

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Children's Theatre In Hollywood

Immaculate Heart College in Hollywood is now operating a Children's Theatre Program bringing live theatre to over 8000 children with every production. The group is under the direction of Sister Marie Fleurette, I.H.M. and is sponsored by the Los Angeles Junior Programs, a group dedicated to providing worthwhile art experiences for children. Because of this sponsorship the Drama Department is financially and practically able to tour productions for six successive week-ends to the outlying districts of Los Angeles.

The productions which have been presented over the past two and a half years include *Wizard of Oz* with a new musical score; a new musical version of *Rumpelstiltskin*; *Greensleeves' Magic*, done with incidental music and dances; and the latest production of *Winnie the Pooh*. This production was also accompanied by incidental music written especially for the production by William Kraft, percussionist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestra. A small orchestra always tours with each show.

Each play is first given five performances at the College and then, on the following week-end, is presented four more times at the University of California at Los Angeles. This year, these performances were followed by a tour of all the major areas of the Los Angeles vicinity. Future plans for the Children's Theatre productions include another tour next year of an original musical tentatively titled *The Magic Apron*.

In addition to theatre for children the drama, music and art departments of the college have conducted a fine arts



"Winnie the Pooh" at Immaculate Heart

workshop for children from six to twelve years of age during the summer session. Last summer an experimental production of *The Crucible* was presented as part of the adult theatre program, and this fall the theatre schedule included: an original dance-drama of *The Juggler of Our Lady*, an experimental reading of Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, (also presented at the Northwestern regional meeting of NCTC), and a series of readings of contemporary poetry. Plans for the spring and summer include Productions of Menotti's *The Medium* and *The Telephone*; Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden*; experimental readings of *The Trojan Women* and *Under Milkwood*; a summer workshop for high school students with two one-act productions; a workshop in creative dramatics for middle-grade children especially correlated with the teaching of religion; and an experimental production of *The Tidings Brought to Mary*.

North Central Region

While attending the Advisory Council meeting of AETA at the University of Minnesota, the President was privileged to meet with the North Central regional chairman, Sister Michaela, O.S.B., and with the Twin Cities directors. Sister Charitas, C.S.J. of the Executive Board was hostess at the informal round table discussion which was held at St. Joseph's Provincial House at 3 p.m. January 5.



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THEATRICALITY IN THE THEATER

by Teddy Kinsey Handfield

CHAPTER II

We have now agreed that good acting should be convincing, true to human behavior, and that it is the result of a Divine gift and not usually the result of a learning process. However, just being convincing is not enough; any actor worth his salt must be theatrical as well. When I use this term, "theatrical" I mean characteristic of the theater and not artificial or showy—two quite different meanings. It seems fairly logical to me that if an actor must work in a theater building, then his techniques should be characteristic of the medium in which he works; in other words, he should and must adjust himself completely to all that the theater building demands of him in the form of limitations and freedoms. When he has successfully done this, I believe that he can be called, "theatrical."

What, then, are the demands of the theater on an actor? First of all, in order for the theater to exist at all, people must come, must pay their money, must see the show, and must keep coming. If this does not happen, the theater as an enterprise will not last very long. Hence, it seems that the actor must keep his livelihood alive by being interesting enough to attract people to the theater, and once having played to them, he should be vital enough to entice them back, again and again. An actor cannot afford, in the literal sense, to be boring; he must above all be interesting in some way, shape, or form. Sometimes this quality is referred to as a plus-quality—an extra-something which is attractive and arresting to other people. I dare say that a talented person is born with a "plus-quality" of some sort, but all too frequently the young actor, unsure of himself, puts on such a showy and arty front, that he loses his unique quality, that quality which God gave to no one else, and which, if used to its full, could possibly make him intensely interesting to others. In this way, I think it possible that a person can uncover his "plus-quality" by developing a confidence in his own ability and as a result drop the front which was not his in the first place.

In addition to an actor's interest value to keep the theater alive, he must also be able to respond to the physical size of the building, by being able to fill the yawning gap between the audience and himself. This means that his acting must be "larger than life" if it is to seem real and natural to those people some distance away from him. Actually the terms "realistic acting" or "natural acting" are misnomers in that it is not the acting which is either realistic or natural, but the result or the effect. Most people understand this; the only person who doesn't seem to understand is the amateur who takes these terms at face value. As a result, he can't be heard past the second row and because he doesn't bridge the gap between him-

self and the audience, the yawning part increases tremendously. He must learn to be a bit more "unnatural" on the stage. A very famous French actor, Coquelin, once put it this way:

You are in the theater and not in the street or at home. If you put on the stage the action of the street or the home, there will result very much what would happen if you were to put a life-sized statue on top of a column: it would no longer seem to be life-sized.

So therefore, all the actor does should be influenced by the size of this distance—he must be bigger than life on the stage in order to seem life-sized to the audience. This demands a larger voice, larger gestures, larger movements, and lots of other things like costumes and make-up. Everything the actor does must be selective and distinctive for one big reason: to get the play across to the audience. I guess this is the reason for the shock that some people get when they sit in a front row of the theater and see the exaggeration or the bigger than life technique of the stage. It is also the reason why famous stage actors sometimes get bad reviews when they act on television. The space isn't there in television; the actor does not need such bigger-than-life techniques, and he looks hammy to the living room audience. The actor then does not need to be "theatrical" because he is working in a different medium.

I have used the word, technique, a number of times and I'd better say just what I mean by it (like Humpty-Dumpty) so that it will pay its own way. A technique is a way of doing something, and an actor's technique would be the method he uses to express his character to the audience.

The best way for an actor to learn the techniques of his trade is to act in as many plays as possible with better actors than himself, and also to see as many plays as possible. While he is doing this, he should keep his eyes open, and his mouth shut. If this advice is observed, he may possibly learn something from other people. The next best way is probably to attend a good acting school and take lessons. However, acting is an active and not a contemplative art and the best way to learn it is to do it. In a way acting is like baseball and football: the facts in books cannot possibly substitute for the experience of playing the game. I have the feeling that an inexperienced man could be clobbered in the first few minutes of play in a football game even if he knew every fact that had been written down on the subject of football. An actor can be just as unbelievably bad in his own way and still be able to discuss Stanislavsky and "The Method" with surprising lucidity. Young actors who are too much prone to reading and talking about the theater would do better by just trying to act in the theater.

The actor must learn as much as he can about the technique of his voice and his body because these are his means of communication. All artists communicate with something different: the poet uses words, the musician uses pure sound, and the actor uses himself. However, just because the actor was born with his means of communication, it does not necessarily

follow that he was born knowing just how to use them—for instance, he was not born knowing how to talk. So, just as a musician could never play a Beethoven sonata without first practicing scales, the actor should never lose sight of the importance of first training and developing his voice and his body.

(Next month: Techniques and Voice and Body)

Thank You

The President wishes to thank the Kansas City Unit, the Blue Ridge Region, the Pennsylvania Unit, the Wichita Unit, and the East Central Region for their contributions of \$25.00 each to the national treasury and the Chicago Drama Festival for its contribution of \$200.00. With such cooperation we will be able to work toward our goal—the establishment of a permanent executive secretarial office.

We also wish to thank Miss Therese Marie Cuny for the wonderful interview of the Conference she arranged in the January issue of TODAY magazine.

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IN CASE OF MURDER

By Frank Watton. A sparkling mystery-farce in which a TV writer's story of a homicide seems to come all too true. Cast: 7 M, 6 W.

IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD

By Charles Quimby Burdette. Evil omens prevail in an ancient house which is being renovated, providing an excellent blend of mystery and humor. Cast: 5 M, 6 W.

MIDNIGHT

By Glenn Hughes. A counterfeiting press and an unusual assortment of people—all in a supposedly deserted house on New Year's Eve. A truly clever play. Cast: 7 M, 6 W.

For full description of these plays, write for the Row-Peterson Drama Catalogue.

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I SAW TWO PREMIERES

by Sister Mary Immaculate, C.S.J.
St. Joseph Academy, Wheeling, W. Va.

The story of Bernadette Soubirous and her visitations by our Heavenly Mother has had many tellings but there are two most intimately concerned with Catholic Theatre, and in both it has been my privilege to play a little part.

Catholic University Drama School was six years old when "The Song of Bernadette," later published by Dramatic Publishing Company, had its world premiere. Wheeling College, "the baby of the Jesuit colleges" was three years old when it premiered "Smallest of All" now being published by Samuel French Incorporated. Watching these two "firsts" was most interesting. Let me tell you a little bit.

Washington, D. C. will never be hotter than it was in the summer of 1944 when "The Song of Bernadette" was being launched upon the theater-going public.

Matching the thermometer registration was the fever of excitement at Catholic University Drama School. Jean and Walter Kerr had begun their life work of collaboration by dramatizing Franz Werfel's best-selling book; Ralph Brown had perfected his system of projections that would revolutionize scenic changes; Franz Werfel would be present; Jennifer

Jones would be present, and with Jennifer would be Anita Colby, personal representative of David O. Selznik. To those impressed by Hollywood this was most stimulating; to those upon whom Hollywood has only a depressing effect, it was merely "another of those occasions." The cast and production crew was a concrete demonstration of the catholicity of the University for it was composed of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, religious, lay persons, every one of whom was really thrilled over this portrayal of the story of the little French peasant girl



"SMALLEST OF ALL"



"THE SONG OF BERNADETTE"

and her meetings with her "lovely lady." Those of us who were working on makeup and costumes were as eager in the execution of our performance as the diminutive Bernadette and the arrogant Peyramale were in theirs.

Witnessing the beauty, the precision, the perfection on the stage of the small music auditorium, one would never imagine the close, crowded, cramped quarters from which all of this had evolved. The Drama Department at that time consisted of a few rooms in the Music Building, many of them in the basement where the pipes along the ceiling served as supports for the hangers bearing the costumes. Classes were conducted in these rooms every day, costumes or no costumes. They dangled in every aisle and one pushed them aside when one sat down. It was not bad before the play, nor even after the first night, but by the time a week had passed the poverty of the Cachot which housed the Soubirous family was more than apparent to our nostrils.

But the critics didn't know all that; they didn't know that the nuns' habits sent from the costumers were "absolutely impossible" and that at the last minute we had to run around to find nun summer-students who had extra habits that would fit

and inveigle them into letting their habits join in "the Song." The critics knew nothing of the endless hours of sewing, of the running back and forth in that city of "magnificent distances," of back-breaking jobs of painting and building that went on into the wee small hours. They saw only a beautifully inspiring production to which they gave unstinted praise and which they urged to go on into greener pastures, to Broadway itself. This it did with Betsy Ross from Catholic University playing the lead.

It would be interesting to ascertain if possible how many productions of "The Song of Bernadette" there have been since that summer of 1944, and how many there will be during the centennial year. I, for one, would have done it had not Father Kernan come up with his "Smallest of All." Two friends in far corners of the country have signified their intention of re-producing it, and Catholic University will do it again. How I should love to work behind the scenes on this production after thirteen years!

"Smallest of All" is the Bernadette story told with utmost simplicity. You couldn't make it elaborate if you wanted to,

(Continued on page eleven.)



Anna and her angel bake cookies while Anna's double looks on. Scene from "The Anna Angel" by Ruth Sawyer at the College of St. Francis, Joliet, Ill.

Joliet's Small Fry

The Children's Theatre at the College of St. Francis, Joliet, Ill. was founded in 1940 for a three fold purpose:

1. The education of the entire child. His emotions should receive special attention and channeling. Poise and ability to think clearly in oral communication was to be stressed.
2. The theatre was founded also to furnish good entertainment for the children of the city.
3. It was also founded as a laboratory for the training of college students who wished to work with children either in formal theatre or in creative dramatics.

The theatre has a membership of one hundred and forty children from the ages of five up through Sophomores in High School. These children meet weekly for an hour's class in creative dramatics.

The creative dramatic class lays the foundation for participation in the formal plays which are given in December, January and in May. All children who wish may participate in one formal production a year. All plays are double cast.

All Junior High students who wish may be on back stage crew duty—lighting crew, make-up crews and help with the production. The members also take care of ushering and tickets. Thus they may, if they wish, acquire a technical knowledge, as well as a knowledge of acting.

The theatre gives three formal productions a year. The plays must meet the demands of various age levels. Sister Mary Fernanda, O.S.F., is director.

Festivals

San Francisco Unit Drama Festival was held on December 13 at Santa Clara University, with Robert F. Shea, chairman. Productions included "Twelve Angry Men," "What Every Woman Knows," "One Sunday Afternoon," "The Royal Assassin," "Hyacinths," and a three-act play, "Sondelis."

Lectures, demonstrations and panels were given by Sister M. Consilia, I.H.M., Dr. John F. Pauley, George Smedberg, Dr. James H. Clancy, William R. James, Ken Letner, Carol Veit, Lyn Pauley, James Torrens, S.J., Sister M. Cyril, Father Joseph Brusher, S.J., Sister Helene, O.P., Brother V. Matthew, James W. Mitchell, Sandra Balanesi and Darryl Hickman.

Festival committee included Mr. Shea, Mr. James, Father Brusher, Sister Marie Fleurette, Sister Consilia, Edward Romano and James W. Mitchell.

* * *

Tenth Annual One Act Play Festival for Twin City Catholic High Schools was held on November 23 at De La Salle High School, Minneapolis, Minn., and on November 25 at St. Agnes High School, St. Paul, Minn. Sister Michaela, OSB, chairman of the North Central Region, was critic judge.

Productions included: "The Devil and Daniel Webster," "Thanks, Awfully!," "Recognition Scene from Anastasia," "The Clock Shop," "In the Days of Mary," "The Food," "The True in Heart," "The Gift of Tenyin," "Minor Miracle," "Ladies of the Mop."

Festival Chairman was Sister M. Patrice, SSND; Monsignor A. Schladweiler is pastor of St. Agnes and Brother J. Norbert, F.S.C., is principal of De La Salle. Festival was dedicated to Sister M. Caritas, C.S.J.

* * *

An Illinois Unit play festival is scheduled for Saturday, February 1. Six high schools will participate. Father Mathias Kucera, Chairman of the Speech Dept. of St. Procopius College, Lisle, Ill., will be the Critic Judge.

* * *

Under the leadership of Sister Mary Avila, the East Central Region held a Theater Day at Marygrove College on Nov. 2. Productions during the day included scenes from "The Mikado," "In the Zone," an interpretative reading of "Oedipus Rex," and scenes from "Glass Menagerie."

During the afternoon session, Father Urban Nagle, O.P., spoke on "Theatre Through the Ages."

Next Month Technical Edition

I SAW TWO PREMIERES

(Continued from page nine.)

else you would shatter its integrity. You can do it on your great big doorstep with a couple of broken chairs, an old table, and a tree stump. There are no nuns, so you need worry about no habits; there are only eight speaking parts as contrasted with seventeen in "Song of Bernadette." You need have no larger number in the mob than will make a convincing noise, and in these days of "rock 'n roll 'n roar," only a very few are required to do that.

After assisting with the premiere of "Song of Bernadette" at Catholic University, I came home and did it myself, and although it involved all sorts of hardships, including the substitution of a brand new Dean Peyramale two days before the show, it has always been a happy memory. When Father Kernan informed me of the premiere of "Smallest of All," I told him that we could supply him with all properties and most of the costumes that he would need. But I was totally unprepared for the few things that he actually needed. You high school directors who have longed to tell Our Lady's story, but have been prevented because of lack of suitable properties or persons to portray the characters, you have at hand now a play that is a director's dream.

The characters are not nearly so challenging as those in the Kerr play. There is no spiritually proud Sister Vauzous, there is no Mother Superior, nor Aunt Bernarde, all of whom are difficult for high school youngsters because they are not characters with whom they are familiar. The others, yes, even the Dean, unfortunately, can be found anywhere at almost any time. There is a Bernadette, if not in every class, at least in every school, the little girl who cannot learn the answers, but whose "other-worldliness" is recognized by all her classmates; Toinette and Jeanne are the impish school-girls of whom we have a goodly number; the worried, frustrated mother, the ne'er-do-well father are neighbors known only too well. Casting presents no problems; staging presents no problems; "Smallest of All" makes no demands.

Nor does "Smallest of All" make any pretensions. It will not seek Broadway's glitter; it will be content to help spread devotion to Our Lady in the quiet, humble places. And it will do that easily. As I watched the matinee performance and noted the reactions of a thousand elementary grade school children, I was intrigued by their attention and by the understanding with which they accepted the spiritual transformations taking place before them. I felt that it was only the hours of contemplation of the Poor Clare author, Sister Mary Francis, that could transmit with such incisive clarity this spiritual message comprehensible to young and old alike.

Our Lady has always been very gracious to me; I have many blessings for which to be grateful to her. Chief among them are the opportunities she has given me to show my love for her in song and story, and particularly the opportunity of being among the group who participated in the premieres of "Song of Bernadette" and "Smallest of All."

FAVORITE PLAYS FOR CATHOLIC THEATRE

by Sister Mary Angelita, B.V.M.

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CYRANO

BOY WITH A CART

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MURDER IN A NUNNERY
LADIES OF THE JURY

Joint Council of the Arts in Education

Richard Duprey represented N.C.T.C. in the second exploratory meeting of the Joint Council at the Cooper Art Union, New York City. At the session a tentative set of constitutions was drawn up. Mr. Duprey advises our participation in the Council at this time.

A word about Mr. Duprey. His Villanova Players presented a striking theatre-in-the-round presentation of "Saint Joan" at the Pennsylvania Drama Clinic, and he is presently engaged in preparing "Taming of the Shrew" for presentation in late March.

When the new graduate department of speech and drama is inaugurated at Villanova University this summer, which will specialize in direction and design, Mr. Duprey will head the department. A graduate of Tufts University, he is at present a member of the Villanova English department.

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The "Twirps" Caught Up With Me

(Continued from page four.)

One nun's conversion to CT may not appear to you as such a potent argument for setting up your own lemonade stand. Let me, therefore, rehearse for you briefly the standard pedagogy on Children's Theatre:

For each child it is:

The beginning of an appreciation of a great art.

An experience in thinking and expressing ideas clearly and effectively, which develops poise as well as flexibility of body and voice.

A means for controlled emotional release—a healthy constructive outlet is afforded.

A practice in strongly motivated social cooperation.

An understanding and appreciation of life values drawn from human experiences as portrayed on the stage.

The basis for becoming a discerning member of an adult audience of the future.

No true educator, realizing the dearth of good theatre for children who spend hours digesting so much anemic entertainment provided by movies, radio and television (the latest version of *The Pied Piper* included) can afford to let slip the greatest hope of tomorrow's theatre—Children's Theatre.

But why Children's Theatre at college level? Children's Theatre has many advantages for college "twirps" as well as small fry. It is one of the best means for "Junior Miss" to "really let go." For in CT one must have action or else. And there is no college drama department that does not have at least one young hopeful, fresh from high school, who won an oratorical contest once and is sure she can make Broadway. Well, in my opinion, if she has any possibilities, CT will uncover them.

And for those planning to teach, CT is a gold mine. Once the prospective "schoolmarm" has directed a play for

or with children, the rewards are exceedingly great. The teacher's work is finished. Another complete conversion has taken place.

Besides the educational advantages it offers on all levels—grade, high school, college and adult, CT has a fascination all its own—it's that *wonderful repsonse* that sells you on Children's Theatre. They're still—with no apologies to Atkinson and Kerr—theatre's best critics—and the least inhibited.

Rosalind Russell

Dear Mr. Foster
Thank you for the
National Children's Theatre Conference
Annual I found it very in-
teresting & was delighted to
read of all the exciting &
worthwhile work being done
by Children's Theatre workers
on your side!

Warmest Congratulations,

Rosalind Russell

August the 5th

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CT at St. Teresa's

by Sister M. Felice, C.S.J.

College of St. Teresa, Kansas City, Mo.

Children's Theatre has a very definite role in the college curriculum at St. Teresa's. It is not something to be labeled "extra-curricular," something we may take or leave. It is broader than any one department. In fact, there are at least three definite departments that it serves: the Education Department, Home and Family Life, and the Drama Department.

About one-fourth of the students at the College of St. Teresa are preparing themselves to be elementary school teachers. Observing the child's reactions at a play gives these prospective teachers first-hand knowledge of the likes and dislikes, interests and attitudes of the child. One of the grade schools which regularly attends our plays sends us letters from the children afterwards. They tell us what they liked about the play, make comparisons with the play of the preceding year, and even suggest what they would like to see the next year. Some of the teachers make use of the play for an art lesson and the children send us drawings of their favorite character or scene. These letters and drawings are displayed on a bulletin board where the college students may see them.

Several of the elementary schools also use the annual children's play for practice in creative dramatics. Following their attendance at a performance, they enact their favorite scenes from the play for their classmates. At the fifth and sixth grade levels the pupils even do a little critical analysis of the production, evaluating the acting, costuming, lighting, and settings.

Some of our college students are not concerned with careers and professions but are looking to the vocation of the married state and are majoring in Home and Family. These students, who will be the future mothers, need to understand and know the child, as well as the prospective teachers. And they have the same opportunities for studying the interests of the child. It is necessary for them to realize how vital a role theatre plays in making the child a happier and richer being; then they will avail themselves of every opportunity to let the child see "live" drama.

Our third group, those majoring in Drama, are given acting experience in the children's theatre, and perhaps of all

theatre, this is most challenging. A children's audience knows no inhibitions. If a scene is uninteresting, if there is long exposition, or much talk without action, they simply will not listen. A rustle begins in the audience and this mounts until all the children are turning, twisting, and talking to the extent that the actors might as well stop. So the cast soon learn that the play must move, the actors must project, and the scene must command attention. From the standpoint of actor-training, the children's theatre makes a great demand on the student.

All three groups—those in teacher training, in home and family, and in drama—have an excellent opportunity for studying the child, both in his reactions during the performance and in the impact of the drama on him after he has left the theatre. But children's theatre is one part of the curriculum that has a two-way benefit. Its values accrue not only to the college student in her particular phase of study, but also to the child himself.

We will here consider only four of its particular benefits: namely, that the play gives pleasure to the child, stimulates his imagination, develops his sensitivities, and teaches a lesson.

It is to the fairy godmother in his soul that the children's play makes a strong appeal and gives pleasure. It cultivates the imagination by opening a new world for the child and widens the horizons of his experience. He no longer lives in the confines of his own home town, but sails away on magic ships to strange lands and dwells in castles of gold. He lives with kings and queens and has a prince or princess for a playmate. He forms the habit of putting himself in the place of others; his sympathies are broadened and his contacts with life are multiplied.



Cinderella and her cat, Ashes, sit before the fire and dream of the prince's birthday ball.



The witch mother gives advice to Rumpelstiltskin in performance at the College of St. Teresa.

Without teaching or preaching, children's plays present lessons in good morals. Over-estimation of self is constantly pointed out by Aesop as a source of failure. Grimm shows that by being dissatisfied with what we have, we risk even that. Andersen nearly always demonstrates that whatever our lot is, we should make the best of it.

Although it is obvious that the children's theatre has great values for the child, these values will only be realized in prac-

tical life if the play has certain dramatic qualities. In order to hold the attention of the children, for they learn only when they are attentive, a play must have the following qualities:

1. The plot must be generally understood; the story must be within the range of the children's comprehension. Ideally, plays should be presented according to the three age levels—primary, intermediate, and upper grades—but since this is often impossible, a play should be chosen to suit the age of the majority who attend. At St. Teresa's we have on the whole selected fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*, *The Elves and the Shoemaker*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Rumpelstiltskin*.
2. The plot must begin at once and involve plenty of action. It is well to open with something to watch. Young children are slow in interpreting scenes, and pantomime is exceptionally good for them. It quiets the audience and gets them set to listen, before the dialog ever begins. Furthermore, the children are never more quiet than when there is action without words. For example, *Cinderella* opens with Cinderella and Ashes, her cat, washing clothes and hanging them up to dry. We have a picture of Cinderella's drudgery before the stepmother comes in and scolds her for not having all the work finished.
3. The plot must have suspense. Even those in the audience who know the story quite well, forget it for the moment and are carried away by the illusion as if they had never

heard the story before. They will hold their breath, wondering what the giant will do if he finds Jack hidden in the oven. At one of our performances of *Hansel and Gretel*, we had a good example of suspense. In the complications of the plot, the good fairy of the woods who can help Hansel and Gretel get away from the witch is imprisoned in a large box. One of the characters was trying to find the fairy. The children in the audience wanted so very much for the fairy to be found that some of them cried out, "She's in the box!"

4. The play should build steadily and rapidly to the climax and have a short, satisfying conclusion. The audience should not be left puzzled or wondering about the outcome.
5. Comedy must be woven into a serious play to bring relief and relaxation to the children.
6. Justice must be done in the end. The good must be rewarded and the wicked punished. At the conclusion of *Hansel and Gretel*, our children's audience rose from their seats as if to help put the witch into the oven.
7. The play must have free, bold characterization and include some magical people such as fairies, elves, giants.
8. The play must lend itself to interesting staging and costuming. Children love glitter, as found in the court of kings and queens. They love the unusual, as the magic cave of Aladdin, or the knoll where Rumpelstiltskin lives.

THEATRE SCENECRAFT

by Vern Adix

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